DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 122 FL 015 941

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TITLE 10 Days or 10 Weeks: Immersion Programs That Work.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (18th, Milwaukee, WI, April 3-5, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Students; *College Second Language Programs; French; Higher Education; *Immersion Programs; Instructional Innovation; *Intensive Language Courses; Language Skills; *Program Development; Program Effectiveness; *Scheduling; Spanish; Student Characteristics; Teaching Methods; *Time Factors (Learning); Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS College of Saint Scholastica NM; Peace Corps

ABSTRACT

The foreign language faculty at College of Saint Scholastica Minnesota) developed and implemented 10-day Spanish and French immersion programs based on Peace Corps methodology as a means of affording students time for intensive study of those languages, improving students' fluency, and instituting a change in teaching methodology. The first program, in Spanish, had courses at beginning and intermediate levels; it was offered during the summer of 1984 to the college students and people from the Duluth community. The daily schedule, extending from 7:00 a.m. until after 8:00 p.m., included time for individual study, class activities, laboratory exercises, computer drills, physical and social activities, and one hour of personal time. At the end of 10 days, oral and written examinations were given on the material that had been covered in class activities. Success with the Spanish program encouraged development of a French program, which was designed differently to accommodate older adult enrollees' different learning and scheduling needs. The French program had shorter lab periods, more frequent group sessions, and reading and writing exercises throughout the program. The older group covered 30 percent more material than a traditional class would have covered and somewhat less than a younger class would cover. A major accomplishement of this program was that the students overcame a fear of failure during the course. The faculty experienced changed attitudes and renewed enthusiasm toward teaching and, as a result, they have begun to implement minicourses. (MSE)

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COLLEGE OF ST. SCHOLASTICA
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10 Days or 10 Weeks: Immersion Programs That Work

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We have entitled our paper "10 Days or 10 Weeks: Immersion Programs That Work" because good immersion programs don't just happen. It takes a lot of work to create a successful one, especially if it is geared to both traditional and non-traditional students. In our case, we wished to develop a program along these guidelines:

1. Activities should be meaningful and relevant during and after the immersion experience.

2. The program should provide a great variety of activities that create a sense of involvement with the program and the other participants

3. Students' individual learning styles and interests should never be subordinate to an inflexible schedule.

This program actually started as an attempt to reverse the trend away from language classes. In the 70's and early 80's, most colleges and universities across the country had experienced a decline in foreign language registration. This trend was then attributed to many causes, including the abolition of language requirements, increased attention to career preparation, and decreased interest in liberal arts.

The College of St. Scholastica was no exception to this problem, in spite of its strong commitment to a liberal arts education. The problem became more serious when we consider the homogenity and insular nature of our student population: 75 percent from Minnesota, and 15 percent from Wisconsin and Michigan, with only 1 percent from other countries. Moreover, St. Scholastica students tend to be first-generation college students from small towns, with little or no contact with members of minority groups. Besides, in 1968 it was decided to eliminate language requirements. By 1982-83 only 47 out of 1,031 students were enrolled in a language course.

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To be able to assess the problem more realistically, we conducted an anonymous student survey to find out what were the reasons that kept students away from language classes. Some of the reasons suggested in the questionnaire were:

"I'm not interested"

"It doesn't fit in my major"

"I have no time"

"St. Scholastica doesn't offer the language I want or advanced courses in the language I want."

Strikingly, only 15 percent of the responses indicated a lack of interest. Half cited a lack of time, and an additional 15 percent conflicting major requirements. Thus, nearly two-thirds of the responses suggested that students responding to the survey (N=260) would be interested in taking a language if they could fit it in their schedule.

Besides, as language instructors with varied and extensive experience, we had become dissatisfied with the way languages were taught, and with the results obtained. We looked around at other schools, only to find a similar situation and similar dissatisfaction almost everywhere. As Simon Belasco admits, in "Time, Proficiency, and the Best Method: An Editorial," after a lifetime spent in the classroom, "I have yet to encounter a group of students who, having completed two years of foreign language study in high school and two years in college, may be said to have attained a satisfactory level of proficiency." (p. 213)

Belasco's commentary on the relative lack of progress in the mastery of foreign languages intrigued us. On bad days, we often felt he was overly optimistic; on good days we still felt that twinge that says progress was being made, but it was so tedious!

Almost everywhere foreign language instruction has been treated like an ordinary academic subject: large amounts of content must be mastered through specified hours in class and homework assignments. Acting in accordance with this assumption, the majority of students who enroll in an introductory language sequence expect to master a foreign language by the end of the second year. What often happens is that although students master discreet units of material, they are unable to use it in any communicative context. In fact, "more than 95 percent of American high school students who begin the study of another language give up before experiencing the enjoyment of achieving basic fluency." (Ascher, 66-67).

This is the case in college study as well: only ten percent of St. Scholastica students enrolled in language classes reached a level of basic competency.

After much reading and discussion, we arrived at certain premises:

1. All psycho-linguistic principles are ignored when, from day one, language instructors start classes explaining, conceptualizing, and demanding students to repeat and talk when they are totally unprepared for the task. (Ascher, 1981)

2. Language learning is a skill, like playing an instrument. Proficiency is achieved, not by attending class and completing assignments alone, but by practicing and using the language in creative ways. Languages should not be taught as we teach History or Math.

3. If what we want is an intelligent speaker who understands the language and culture, and not a mere parrot, then we must take into account that the pace of learning of each student will differ.

4. Although today's language teachers have a myriad of ancillary material at hand such as computers, sophisticated labs, videotapes, slides, etc., most of these are the products of the same false assumptions on which we have based

language teaching for so long. Moreover, these techniques are only useful if they help students to understand and speak the language, not if they are meant to train robots who respond to cues.

5. Often, students who perform well on written tests or in formal situations are unable to use the simplest phrase in a real-life situation. The transfer between intellectual apprehension and assimilation never occurs.

From these two preoccupations, (1) students' lack of time and (2) instructors' awareness of the need to change, was born the idea of instituting an immersion program at the College of St. Scholastica, since the ideal situation - airlifting our students to the target country - was not a working possibility for us. Our programs would differ from other programs on which we found information in that: a) it would last ten full days, and b) it would use the Peace Corps methodology.

a. All the intensive courses we analyzed used the quarter/semester or summer school format. The difference in scheduling was an increase in the number of contact hours per week, which, in different schools, went from fifteen to twenty hours a week. We decided to offer a ten full-day course in the summer, which would enable students to master the equivalent of one quarter of foreign language study, thus "saving" the student one quarter of course time in the traditional language sequence. In addition, we wanted to make the course available to people in our community who needed to learn the language but could not follow a traditional sequence.

b. We chose the Peace Corps methodology, mainly because it has proved to be highly effective abroad, and also because Diane Kessler had had first-hand knowledge of it when serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in Togo, West Africa. We wanted an integral approach to language, in which class time would be widely

supplemented by activities of all kinds that would ensure effective retention of the material taught, opportunity to use it in a realistic way, and immersion in the target-language culture.

To be able to test this kind of program, we needed funds and went to Exxon for help. They generously gave us the means to cover the salaries of the Project Director, a language consultant, and three teaching assistants, plus the cost of materials such as films, games, magazines, etc. On its part, the College of St. Scholastica contributed with student scholarships, Administration staff time, language and computer laboratory facilities, as well as other indirect expenses.

In the summer of 1984, we then offered our first Immersion Program in Spanish, located at the McCabe Renewal Center, a beautiful mansion that belongs to the Benedictine Sisters. We had fifteen students, twelve of which were beginning and three intermediate. Half of them were St. Scholastica students; the other half, people from the Duluth community. The success of the program was so extraordinary that we implemented two immersion programs in 1985 in French and Spanish. The Spanish program kept the same format. With the French program, we used a different approach to check which would be more effective and/or appealing to students.

For the selection of the new students we used a very comprehensive admission test which covered all structures of the languages plus basic vocabulary. We also asked students to submit a recorded tape or come for an interview. Ten of our second Immersion Program in Spanish students took the test and we found the results very useful, and accurate, for the selection of material.

Another important factor to determine our daily activities was the fact that we had only one teacher available to teach two sessions of the language - Beginning and Intermediate. As expected, the beginning course proved easier to

program, but as is often the case with intermediate students, there were not two with exactly the same abilities. We then needed a schedule that was, at the same time, quite rigid and quite flexible; a schedule that gave plenty of time for group activities, but also for individual work. This is what we came up with.

Daily, students were given detailed schedules of their activities. Beginning students' schedules were headed with a well-known proverb; the Intermediate ones with stanzas or lines from popular Hispanic poetry and prose. A typical day for a Beginning student would read somehow like this:

Morning (N.B.: Schedules were written in the target language).

7:00-7:40	Breakfast
7:50-8:20	Estudio Individual (Time to study for class, review tenses and vocabulary, etc.)
8:30-8:50	Class (Explanations were kept to a minimum. We mainly had activities designed to allow practice of the material they had studied before.)
9:00-9:20	Laboratory (Oral drills for pronunciation and listening comprehension)
9:30-9:50	Break (Students chatted in Spanish, had snacks, and relaxed.)
10:00-10:20	Study with Teaching Assistant (We had native speakers who had been previously trained. For Beginning students, the activities were mainly questions using pictures and drills of nouns, verbs, etc. For Intermediate students, there was conversation on newspaper items they had read, interviews with pictures, dialogue practice, etc.)
10:30-10:50	Class
11:00-11:20	Computer Drills (Drills to reinforce vocabulary and grammatical patterns, games, reading passages, translation exercises, objective tests, fill-in-the-blank exercises, etc. Computers were new to many students and added variety to their study program.)
11:30-12:00	Laboratory: Listening comprehension tapes
Noon	
12:00-1:00	Lunch (Menus were written in the target language and emphasis was on foods from the target culture. There was intensive practice of vocabulary related to food and meals. Beginning students would mainly identify vocabulary such as plates, napkins, carrots, etc. Intermediate students would practice more elaborate vocabulary, trying to guess how the food had been prepared, the ingredients, etc. Besides these few minutes of guided conversation, which served primarily as warm-ups and to break the ice, there was no lack of talk. We always had three or four native speakers available for meal- and snack-times.)
1:00-2:00	Free Time (Time to do laundry, take walks, catch up with lessons, take a nap, etc.)

Afternoon:

2:00-2:30	Individual study
2:40-3:00	Class
3:10-3:30	Workbook practice
3:30-3:40	Break
3:45-4:05	Study with Teaching Assistant
4:10-4:30	Language Laboratory
4:30-5:00	Class
5:10-5:30	Listening Comprehension Tapes
5:30-6:20	Physical activities, such as walks, gym, aerobics, popular dance steps, etc., all in target language. It gave the students time to relax and do some physical activity after a day of hard work and tension.

Evening:

6:30-7:30	Dinner
8:00-	Social Time. Duration: between one and two hours. Activities: films in target language with English subtitles, for beginning students; talks about cultural aspects by native speakers of target langauge; filmstrips; slide-shows; musical introduction to the instruments and music of the target cultures; dance; games; songs; etc.

The intermediate schedule followed roughly the same characteristics, but had more variety of activities. Meal hours and activities were the same, and will be omitted here.

8:00-8:20	Computer drills and reading practice
8:30-8:50	Group Revision (Students paired to review the material that their computer practice had shown to need some extra time)
9:00-9:30	Class
9:30-10:00	Break (Here some conversation topics were suggested to ensure variety of vocabulary)
10:00-10:20	Language Laboratory: Oral drills and listening comprehension practice
10:30-10:50	Reading from Hispanic periodicals and newspapers
11:00-11:20	Conversation on the periodical/newspaper item read (with Teaching Assistants)
11:30-12:00	Native speakers' dialogues recorded: Listening practice, discussion, conversation. (With Teaching Assistants)
2:00-2:20	Reading: Cultural items: discussion and conversation
2:30-3:00	Group revision
3:10-3:30	Individual interviews (With teacher and teaching assistants; rotation of students to ensure variety of styles and dialects)
3:45-4:15	Class
4:20-4:50	Guided oral exercises: dialogue completion; story telling; use of idiomatic expressions; etc.
5:00-5:20	Language laboratory

It should be noted here that both Beginning and Intermediate students did homework: exercises from the workbook for Beginning students and compositions for the Intermediate. The compositions differed in length and complexity according to the level of the student.

Although the activities seem to be rigidly scheduled, and they were as far as time was concerned, they also allowed for personal differences. Study times, either individual or in groups, with or without a Teaching Assistant, allowed students to work on the teaching point they needed more practice on. On a given day, one Intermediate student could be going over the irregular preterit forms while the other was practicing the more complex conditional clauses, and a third one would be brushing up vocabulary or the use of prepositions. Also, Beginning students were allowed to progress at their own pace; those who mastered structures and vocabularies faster could keep on adding material, while those who needed more time and practice to feel comfortable with what they had learned could do so.

Besides, there was plenty of additional material students could use if they had the time, energy, and desire to do so. These included reading material, tapes, records, videotapes, filmstrip programs, games, and computer programs.

At the end of the ten days, students were given oral and written exams on the material they had formally done in class activities. So far, we have had only success stories. Even the students who progressed comparatively least, reached a level of fluency and comprehension seldom attained in a regular class even by the best students. There was a readiness to express themselves in the target language that only comes with the concentration demanded by this kind of course. Students from these courses have traveled to countries where the target language is spoken, both as tourists and also to work, and all of them have been able to conduct conversations and express themselves easily.

FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM

Our success with the Spanish Immersion Program (SIP) encouraged us to offer a similar program in French. At the same time, we were reluctant to duplicate the entire schema of the SIP for several reasons. One was the question of time: there were a number of applicants who were interested in the program, but unable to commit ten twenty-four hour days to it. Secondly, the cost of an Immersion Program is high, since board and room must be factored into the entire fee. Thirdly, there were a number of people interested who were beyond the traditional age of students. We decided therefore, to offer a program that would be shorter in length, less expensive and more geared toward the needs and interests of an older population. In the research we conducted on language training, we found several studies indicating that while adults can learn language, performance on tests involving aural/oral proficiencies does decrease with increasing age, while the ability to comprehend grammatical concepts does not. To compensate for this, the French group had shorter language lab periods and more frequent group sessions. Also, reading and writing exercises were introduced the first day.

In his study of language alienation, Stevick talks of four boundaries which prevent the learner from achieving mastery of the new (second) language. They are: a) boundary between cultural groups; b) boundary that separates the learner (powerless) from the teacher (all-knowing); c) boundary between the learner and fellow students; and, finally, d) boundary between the self that performs and the self that observes. (Stevick, 76).

With a group of highly literate older adults, the fourth type of alienation was the most obvious. Simply put, the older adult felt a greater risk in making a mistake than a younger one would. Many techniques that are normally used in a language class (psycho-drama, rapid-fire drills) were highly inappropriate for

this group. Indeed, the most important factor proved to be a graduated methodology that had three premises: older adults are more patient than younger ones; older adults are more comfortable with exhaustive explanations; older adults have greater ability to extrapolate.

Patience: One of the problems of language teaching is that students are quickly bored with repetitive drills and therefore, a wide variety of techniques must be used to ensure they are absorbing the material. Older adults have had more experience in the necessity of repetition and are actually more comfortable with a smaller variety of drills (they can sustain interest in simple substitution drills much longer than can traditional age students).

Extensive explanation: The group we worked with was used to detail in their professional lives and were much more interested in a complete explanation of why a given grammatical concept worked the way it did. While these explanations were time-consuming, they were well worth the effort as the group was then more interested in applying it; i.e., using the new structure.

Extrapolation: Older adults today share a common educational heritage. Their knowledge of the Humanities is more extensive than that of traditional students. They delighted therefore, in applying new perceptions gained from their study of French to their knowledge of English. Several of them felt indeed that this was the most valuable part of the program.

In conclusion, the major difference between this group and a more traditional group of students was that the older students tired more frequently; therefore they needed more breaks. They still covered 30 percent more material than a traditional class would (ten lessons vs. seven), but there is a strong possibility that a younger group would have covered even more material in an immersion program. However, quantity of material covered has not been our main

gauge of success. The fact that these adults were able to overcome a major handicap - fear of failure - has encouraged us to continue offering such programs for older adults.

The schema offered here is not meant to be the perfect one. As we continue to try new methods, we will undoubtedly make changes.

FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM
Schedule

9:00 a.m.	Dialogue
9:20	Verb Drill
9:35	Grammar
9:50	Language Lab - dialogue repetition - questions on dialogue - substitution drills
10:30	Break
11:00	Vocabulary
11:15	Dictation
11:30	Drills
11:45	Dialogue Practice
12:00	Lunch
1:00 p.m.	French Songs
2:00	Dialogue
2:20	Verb Drill
2:35	Grammar
2:50	Language Lab - dialogue repetition - questions on dialogue substitution drills
3:30	Break
4:00	Quiz
4:30-6:00	French Movie

The College of St. Scholastica also provided for follow-up courses, since, most students still need regular practice to become truly fluent. We notice a special kind of commitment and interest both in the target language and the culture that is higher than in any other student. The experience in communal living creates links among students and students and faculty that add a special pay-off to this kind of program. In their evaluations of the Immersion Programs, which so far have been very positive, not to say glowing, students always emphasize the importance of the friendship and camaraderie that is developed in these days, and without which that task would be almost impossible and not very enjoyable.

As part of the program students learn that languages, even when hard and frustrating many times, are usually fun to learn. This positive attitude is not only needed to survive the intensity of the program but, most importantly, to continue working on the language when the program is over.

On our part, the experience of the Immersion programs helped us give coherence and direction to the changes we felt necessary in the classroom. The consequences for us were threefold: 1. changed attitude to teaching; 2. implementation of mini-programs; 3. renewed enthusiasm, which is a must if we want to make effective and consistent changes. The students have responded eagerly. Though study time is still demanding, the activities are fun, and the results tangible.

To reverse the results Belasco laments (as mentioned earlier in the paper), involves more than a well-equipped language lab. We feel that by regularly taking language out of the classroom into the real world, we have successfully created an environment where proficiency is attainable.

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